

the unexpurgated folk songs of men

... an informal
song-swapping session
with a group of
Texans,
New Yorkers,
and Englishmen
exchanging bawdy songs
and lore,
presented
without expurgation ...

COLLECTED BY
MACK McCORMICK

Recorded in Texas, 1959.
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The Ring-A-Rang-A-Roo

The Keeper of the Eddystone Light

Mamie Had A Baby

Cocaine Bill and Morphine Sue

Take A Whiff On Me

The Bastard King of England

No Balls At All

Barnacle Bill The Sailor

Big Jim Folsom

Cristofo Columbo

The Monk of Priory Hall

The Hootchy Kootchy Dance

Always In The Hallway

The Merry Cuckold

In Crawled One-Hung Lo



Who Stole My Beer?

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Stavin' Chain

You Got Good Business

The Dirty Dozens

Limericks

The Ball of Kirriemuir

Change The Name Of Arkansas!!!

THE BAWDY SONG

by Mack McCormick

This collection stands as a tentative first attempt to document the vast traditional song and narrative that springs from the all-male environment. Few songs found here have been previously recorded; almost none have been recorded in the present unexpurgated form, that is to say, the form in which they are traditionally sung.

After so many years of well-publicized folk song collecting, that this collection should represent a "first" stands as an indictment of prior collections, published or recorded, that purport to represent the songs of English-speaking peoples. Without the bawdry, there can be no honest collection of the rimes of children, of what is sung in college dormitories or in prison cell-blocks, nor of the songs favored by soldiers and seamen. Indeed, the very phrase "sailors' songs" suggests the bawdy to all except those who have compiled the books of them. Typically, the scholars have approached the body of folklore with the tools of a censor, while yet maintaining a pretense of scientific discipline. Acting arbitrarily over several centuries, but with particular zeal since 1900, they have dismissed the traditions which are the province of all-male gatherings, ignored much of what the American Negro sings, and turned away from songs that express popular opinion about certain public officials. The dishonesty has been like that of a theorist who ignores all facts save those which support his own ideal. In consequence, available knowledge of many human traditions is theoretical, largely false, and irreparably lop-sided.

The essential appeal, the fundamental value of any folklore is in its uncontaminated look at, and reflection of, the human spirit, for these folkways are not subject to the value judgments of what is "accepted" in the broad social stream, and therefore they are all the more significant as an insight into what is *truly* accepted, and not only accepted, but remembered, passed along, and embellished. The race strives for the ideal only in certain moments and in certain individuals; its folklore, its primary cultural heritage, depicts a broader range of aspiration, often an incessant and delighted concern with lust, blood, violence, and bawdy humor. Whatever becomes the subject of a taboo — strong drink, narcotics, racial or religious slurs — also becomes the subject of a song. Man panders to his interests and aggressions however they range over the spectacle of life, and himself documents these in the songs and tales he tells to each other. The songs in this collection are entirely and without exception from oral tradition, and are by this fact alone a necessary and fascinating study for the folklorist; even one whose range of investigation might be bounded by so strict a definition as the Merriam-Webster: "... traditional songs, customs, beliefs, tales, or sayings, preserved unreflectively among a people; hence, the science which investigates the life and spirit of a people as revealed in such lore."

Each realm of traditional lore reflects the attitude and language of the group from which it springs. For the most part in bawdy lore, the group is one of men alone, somehow isolated from the feminine temper, and their words and thoughts are mirrored in the songs which are the common property of barracks rooms and the like. Commenting on that classic of the singing soldier, *Mademoiselle From Armentieres*, John T. Winterich has answered those who wonder at what social purpose may be served by the bawdy song: "A song like 'Hinky Dinky Parley Voo', scurrilous, scatological, an endless sequence of vilification, is a splendid and essential safety valve."

Furthermore, out of the whole range of folk songs, the bawdy song is unique in that it is immune to the influence of industrial entertainment which has withered so many of the impulses vital to the folk process. In the present day, a blues singer drinks himself to sleep before a television set, a square dance is a function catered by union musicians, and a night at Carnegie Hall is liable to produce more folk-remnants than a month in the Ozarks. Two great areas of folklore remain unaffected: the equally uninhibited songs of children and of stag gatherings. They use the forbidden words, they dwell on the prohibited topics with an abandon of blunt whimsy, and just as children and segregated men share many frustrations and attitudes of curiosity, so too their songs share many verses and melodies, having in common a spirit of the clandestine. Mass entertainment will not supplant the impulse which produces such songs. Unlike most folk arts, bawdy song is a tradition likely to continue.

Most folklore is grouped by a geographic kinship but here the common ground is less territorial than it is one of circumstance. The kinship is one of men confined, sexually frustrated and isolated from normal affection. It is the condition of the labor camp, the barracks, the messhall, the forecastle – to a lesser extent of the barroom and the college dormitory, to a greater extent of the prison cell.

Despite the garb of rousing melody and humorous regard, the sentiments expressed are often rooted in the sexual bitterness which abounds in such a gathering. Wreathed in mirthful cynicism, the comments are derogatory of women, expounding their faithlessness, their treachery, the rankness of their bodies: "She could never hold the love of a man, for she took her baths in a talcum can."

It is the familiar reaction of protesting-too-much. It is a disparaging of those whose absence is acutely felt. Sex is regarded as a cheap pastime and women as varieties of acrobatic whores; beneath the humor is the scorn of soldiers whose abstinence is broken only by the indifference of prostitutes. Making their own tribute to their needs, these chuckling rimes and bits of fantasy temper the bitterness. They are the blunt songs of lonely men.

* * * * *

Many voices contribute to what is heard on this disc. The vivid and unique bawdy lore of the Negro is heard from a day laborer, a tenant farmer, a professional singer and a delivery man. However, for the most part the singers are a group of white middle class business and professional men – a draftsman, a barber, a musician, a building contractor, a chemist, a TV repairman, a merchant, a physicist – gathered informally. Native Texans, New Yorkers, and Englishmen were present in about equal numbers and the recording captures the spontaneous song-swapping which occurred, the bursts of memory and delight as one song evokes another.

The recording technique is unorthodox in that the singers merely ringed themselves about the microphone, with an iced tub of beer nearby, and simply enjoyed themselves with no effort to maintain a recording studio atmosphere. As a result there are fragments and false starts, intruding noises (beer cans being fished out of the tub and the slamming of the toilet door), and an occasional off-mike voice. But as a result of this free song-swapping atmosphere one can witness a vital demonstration of the folk process. The singers only rarely have an opportunity to recall these songs of their youth and military service but as the evening wore on, to their own amazement, long-forgotten verses and songs came as one man's recollection prodded another's. At times they offer contrasting versions of the same song or surprise each other with strange verses to certain favorite songs. They demonstrate for us how traditional lore is unreflectively stored in the mind, and the moods which bring it forth.

THE RING-A-RANG-A-ROO: A children's song, known on both sides of the Atlantic.

THE KEEPER OF THE EDDYSTONE LIGHT: Texas cowboys used to sing, as did English seamen, this song speculating on the sex-life of the chap who minds the Eddystone Lighthouse, 14 lonely miles off the coast of Cornwall.

MAMIE HAD A BABY: New York schoolchildren use this song to torment their playground instructors.

COCAINE BILL AND MORPHINE SUE: Despite the American place names this song is best known in Great Britain and is sung here by two Englishmen who had only just met for the first time and discovered they knew an almost identical version of it. A related song is in Sandburg's *American Songbag* as "Cocaine Lil."

TAKE A WHIFF ON ME: This is Texas' well-known first cousin to the preceding song. Versions of this often begin naming two streets in the Deep Elm section of Dallas:

I walked up Ellum and I came down Main,

Looking for a man to buy cocaine

In 1891, Gates Thomas collected a version from Texas Negroes:

Ho, lo, Baby, take a look at me.

Went to the hop-point, went in a lope;

Sign in the 'scription case, "No More Dope."

which is substantially the same as a verse the two Englishmen sang to "Cocaine Bill and Morphine Sue."!

A whorehouse version of the song has the chorus as "Ho, Ho, Honey, take your leg off mine" and another variation is Charlie Poole's "Take A Drink On Me" recorded in the 1920s. Recordings by Blind Jesse Harris and Lead Belly are in the Library of Congress and a version as "Take A One On Me" from Mississippi Negroes in 1909 was published in the *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 28.

THE BASTARD KING OF ENGLAND: A watered-down version of this appears in John Jacob Niles' book *Songs My Mother Never Taught Me*. The ballad is a composite portrait of royalty; William the Conqueror fulfills the description in so far as being illegitimate and having a passion for the hunt — reference to this having razed farmland to create the New Forest game preserve. His son, William II, was to a great extent the dissolute individual described. Both father and son struggled with Philip I of France over the possession of certain Norman territories. Rivalry over the "Queen of Spain" suggests Eleanor of Aquitaine who carried her Spanish territories first to the French throne with her marriage to Louis VII, and later to the English crown with a subsequent marriage to Henry II. Her son by the latter became King John, a widely despised tyrant booed by the crowds, over who Philip II of France won a decisive victory and received tribute from the English throne. Widely known to several generations of college students, the ballad may have originated from a history student who was shocked to discover how often the destiny of nations has been ruled by hot pants in high places.

NO BALLS AT ALL: The two versions of the song are given by, respectively, a New Yorker and a Texan, the former setting the tragic narrative to the tune best known as "The Strawberry Roan." On hearing these an ex-soldier recalled a verse he heard in Australia during World War II:

I know a girl, she was lean, she was tall,

She married a man who had no ass at all.

BARNACLE BILL THE SAILOR: The original sea song was "Abram Brown the Sailor" in which form it is published in Joanna Colcord's *Songs of American Sailors*. A later adaptation as "Rollicking Bill The Sailor" is in Frank Shay's *Iron Men and Wooden Ships*. This is one of many bawdy songs adapted and popularized by the music business — the 1930 record by Hoagy Carmichael being noteworthy only as a curio that brought together Bix Beiderbecke, Benny Goodman, Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Bubber Miley, Joe Venuti and Gene Krupa.

BIG JIM FOLSOM: Another song on the private lives of public figures, this report is both recent and substantially accurate. The most explicit account of bastardy by the two-time Alabama governor James Folsom is that written by William Bradford Huie and published in his collection *Wolf Whistle* (Signet, 1959). It is a hair-raising account of one of those bizarre figures created by Southern politics. Folsom, a 6'8" giant from Cullman, Alabama, became enamored of his own sex-appeal (partly as a result of reading *A Lion Is In the Streets*, a fictional account of a sexy politician) and built himself both a local and a national image as Kissin' Jim. In the course of this, he

fathered a child by a hotel cashier during his first successful campaign for the governorship in 1946. According to Huie's account, each fall when the boy starts to school he explains to his new teacher: "I live with my grandparents," he says, "My mother is dead. My father is Governor Folsom, but he doesn't claim me. Before my mother died she told me all about it. She said I was not to be ashamed and was always to tell my teacher. When I have fights you'll know it's because somebody is calling me a bastard. My mother said I wasn't really a bastard, that she and my father were legally married." (This last refers to legal marriage under the terms of Alabama's common-law statute.)

CRISTOFO COLUMBO: The psuedo-historical ballad is one of the mainstays of bawdy lore, and its best known example is the song that has Columbus on his knees at Queen Isabella's feet saying: "I tell you true the world is round-o, give me ships and men, I'll bring you back Chicago." Other versions are found in *Songs My Mother Never Taught Me* and *Iron Men And Wooden Ships*.

THE MONK OF PRIORY HALL: A good many folk songs, bawdy and otherwise, are sung at the expense of the clergy, revealing the laymen's deep contempt for the hypocrite. Compare this well known English song – which is joyously set to the German air "Ach, du lieber Augustine" – with two anticlerical comments from the U.S. South:

*Deacon goes round to your house,
Sister says "May I take your bat?"
Old Deacon looks around slyly
Says, "Sister, where is your husband at?"*

*Some folks say a Preacher won't steal,
But I caught two in my corn field.*

THE HOOTCHY KOOTCHY DANCE: The man, woman, or child who has not heard this song is a rare person, yet it is not to be found in any book or record documenting folk song. (The same is true of a number of other songs of all kinds, illustrating the curious discrepancy between what people are singing and what the folklorists are reporting.) It has not, however, been ignored by Tin Pan Alley merchants who used it first in 1893 for a sarcastic comment on Little Egypt's dancing at the Chicago World's Fair, "She Never Saw The Streets of Cairo," and again in 1913 for "In My Harem." Not heard in the present version are the two best known verses which begin "All the girls in Spain go dancing in the rain . . ." and "All the girls in France wear tissue paper pants . . ."

ALWAYS IN THE HALLWAY: Parodies of commercial songs are usually made and sung by night club comics. This is one of the few that has been absorbed by oral tradition, being a favorite song of children.

THE MERRY CUCKOLD: This is probably the most diversified and widely known song in the English language. Known to scholars as Child #274 a version is to be found in nearly every standard anthology under such titles as "The Sailor's Return," "Four Night's Drunk," and "Our Goodman." It was first published in 1776 in *The Ancient and Modern Scots Songs, Heroic Ballads, etc.*:

*Far hae ridden, and farer hae I gane,
But buttons upon blankets I saw never nane.*

and is known in countless contemporary versions ranging from the present recording, as sung by an Englishman, to one sung by a Houston Negro entertainer:

*I said to my wife, "Explain to me,
What is this hotchee-baba,
In the Tuity-Fruity
Where my own hotchee-baba ought to be?"*

IN CRAWLED ONE-HUNG LO: It would be stretching a point indeed to link this narrative with the *Song of Roland*, the Arthurian legends, or the hero tales told by Homer, but nonetheless it is a basic trait of human society to produce spoken epics of the fierce encounters between two strong personalities. Wherever they occur they typically employ a hard, biting rime, terse statement, and harsh imagery to evoke the sense of the deeds done. The tradition persists in such contemporary lore as the *spoken* narratives telling of the encounter between Stackolee and Billy Lyons, between the Monkey and the Baboon, between the Lion and the Signifying Monkey, between Davy Crockett and Pompcalf, and between Shine and the white folks aboard the *Titanic*. To this group must be added the epic of the grotesque battle between One Hung-Lo and the Chinese maiden. As in all such tales, the theme reveals the

temper of the people who produce it, and even with its mock-Oriental characters this is a most uncomfortable one to live with. In its portrait of rivalry between the sexes, not only are our heroes of small stature, but we have here word of the utter and humiliating defeat of the male.

WHO STOLE MY BEER?: This is the product of a conversation-opener around Texas beer taverns.

DICKY DIDO: In any collection of songs sung at stag gatherings, a notable percentage will describe a mythic and ominous female: gross, insatiable, and competitive. Concern over the possibilities of Amazons seems to haunt modern man no less than it did the Greeks. The archetype occurs in such bawdry as "The Bloody Great Wheel," "The Harlot of Jerusalem," "The Pirate Wench," "Dirty Gertie from Bizerte," and "Salome." This is only a mild example set to the gentle Welsh air "The Ashgrove."

SHINE AND THE TITANIC: Few incidents have caught the folk imagination so well as the Titanic disaster. In the years following the event more than a dozen songs, ranging from the religious to the comic, dealt with the sinking and the record company catalogs of the 1920s featuring such selections as "When That Great Ship Went Down" by William and Versey Smith (Victor). "The Titanic" by Ernest V. Stoneman (Okeh), "Sinking of the Titanic" by Rabbitt Brown (Victor), "God Moves On The Water" by Blind Willie Johnson (Columbia), "Titanic Man" by Ma Rainey (Paramount), and "Titanic Blues" by Hi Henry Brown (Vocalion). Antecedents of the present "toast" were published as "De Titanic" in Carl Sandburg's *American Songbag* and as "Travelin Man" in Odum and Johnson's *Negro Work-A-Day Songs*.

All have in common the idea of drawing humor or pathos from the dramatic circumstances in which the ship's carefully erected barriers between rich and poor were transcended by a disaster that threatens everyone aboard. Here, it is a burly stoker who merely swims back to Liverpool, leaving the rich folks to drown. It is a pungent moral and a refreshing idea, but one sadly contrary to the facts. In actuality, during the several hours it took for the *Titanic* to sink after gashing open its hull on an iceberg, first call on seats in the lifeboats (of which there were not enough to accommodate all aboard) was given to holders of first-class tickets. When the death-rolls were tallied, the largest percentage of survivors was among the first-class passengers, with second-class next in order, and the greatest percentage (as well as number) of lives lost among steerage passengers and crew.

In this recording, much of the delight comes from the Negro's triumph over the whites. A similar theme occurs in another Texas-made account of the *Titanic*, a song evolved by Lead Belly, Blind Lemon Jefferson, and other Dallas street singers (which borrows a great deal from a religious song about the disaster composed by evangelist Blind Butler.) Their song tells how Captain Smith refused passage to the Galveston-born world champion boxer Jack Johnson ("I ain't haulin no coal") and how Johnson later danced for joy when he heard of the ship's fate ("You mighta seen a man do the Eagle Rock.")

But for all the different accounts inspired by the *Titanic*, that best known in contemporary tradition is this narrative "toast" recited by Negro students, who frequently chorus it en masse as they ride chartered buses to school games.

YOU BE KIND TO ME: The first two verses of this song are out of the cycle of insults known as "The Dirty Dozens," and the last two are usually sung about the lecherous "Uncle Bud." Fuller versions of both appear later in this collection.

BOAR HOG BLUES: This song should not be thought of as "suggestive" for, to a Negro, the image of a red, winking, heavy-lidded hog-eye is a colorful but in no way veiled description. And by extension of this vulvic symbol, the connoisseur is known as the hog-eye man:

Sal in the garden was sifting sand,

All upstairs with the hog-eye man.

What are you going to do with your hog-eye, hog-eye?

What are you going to do with your hog-eyed man?

That song, derived from shanties sung by Negro seamen, has wandered so far that Cecil Sharp heard it in 1917 from white singers in the sequestered mountains of Clay County, Kentucky, and published it in his *English Folk-Songs from The Southern Appalachians*. Among the many other songs which use the "hog-eye" symbol, not to mention the mythology which has personified Hog-Eye as one of the great adventurers of Negro lore, there is "The Hog-Eye Man" that Carl Sandburg published in his *American Songbag*:

O the hog-eye men are all the go,

When they come down to San Francisco.

*And a hog-eye, railroad nigger with his hog-eye,
Row the boat ashore and a hog-eye O,
She wants the Hog-eye man.*

The term "hog-eye" may variously be a nickname, a destination for a kind of barge or a variety of wrench. Or, in a particular usage, it may mean the bung hole in the kind of cask known as a hogshead. Thus "hog-eye" comes to denote a man who makes frequent trips to the whiskey barrel. But the spirit of bawdy song is never so well served as when a single phrase conjures up a tribute to both strong drink and pretty women, and so the term "hog-eye" is inseparable from the graphic image made explicit in this particular recording.

Actually the present recording is a re-creation of the famous original made by Texas Alexander in 1928 ("Boe Hog Blues," Okeh 8563). The two verses heard here are identical to ones on the original and the singer achieves a remarkable imitation of Alexander's moaning style. The special agents who built up the "race" and "country" catalogs for the commercial record companies beginning in the 1920s were able to face the facts of popular culture in a way that folklorists have seldom managed. As a result a reasonably fair sampling of American song is to be found on old records. Still, much of the bawdy song slips off into a self-conscious leer. But the 66 selections recorded by Texas Alexander stand apart. Verse after verse is a toast to love. In different songs he is a man eager to please (*Tell me, pretty woman, how you want your rolling done*); a man full of anticipation (*I got a new way of loving make the springs scrinch on the bed*); a man strained by excesses (*You done fooled around here and made me break my yo-yo string*); an instructor in technique (*Say, I learned her how to ride, man, from side to side*); and a man weary of philandering (*Let's stop our foolishness and try to settle down*). To him, women were both sweet and evil, and accordingly, he praised them with a sense of pure joy and damned them with a brooding imagination:

*I heard a great mumbling deep down in the ground,
It musta been the devil turning them women around.*

GRUBBING HOE: A bit of barnyard humor.

UNCLE BUD: Across the United States people sing the antics of Uncle Bud, a character who gets himself mixed up with such diverse songs as "Springfield Mountain" ("Uncle Bud ran 'cross the field, rattlesnake bit him in the heel") and "Salty Dog":

*Scaredest I ever was in my life,
Uncle Bud came home and caught me kissing his wife:
Oh, salty dog, you salty dog.*

The scholars have printed reports of him, quaintly bowdlerized:

*There's corn in the field, there's corn in the shuck,
There's girls in this world ain't never been touched.
O Bud, Uncle Bud, O Bud, O Bud, O Bud.*

But in Texas these songs have become associated with one individual, the notorious Bud Russell – the prison transfer man who used to collect convicted men from each of the state's 254 far-flung counties and transport them to the Huntsville prison "walls" and thence to the convict farms spread out along the Brazos river bottoms. To Texans, Uncle Bud is at once the familiar old lecher, and the grim figure who comes to town with chains and shackles – as described in a verse of "The Midnight Special":

*"Yonder comes Bud Russell."
"How in the world do you know?"
"Tell him by his big hat
And his .44."
He walked into the jailhouse
With a gang o' chains in his hands,
I heard him tell the captain,
"I'm the transfer man."*

Among Texans past the age of 40 there is hardly one that has not joked about Uncle Bud or nodded his head in sad acknowledge as a blues singer described him, as in such lines as those sung by Waco-bred pianist Mercy Dee (Arhoolie F1007)

*Uncle Bud swore he never saw a man that he couldn't change his ways,
When I say Uncle Bud, I mean Bud Russell – the king-pin and boss way back in red-beifer days.*

Or by James Tisdome:

*Uncle Bud will shoot you with a pistol, he'll whip you with a single-tree,
Got all them boys shouting, crying "Lord, please have mercy on me."*

Or by Lowell Fulson:

*You oughta been on the river – oh, nineteen and ten,
When Bud Russell drove pretty women like he did ugly men.*

The list could be extended to include lines about Bud Russell from Smokey Hogg, Manny Nichols, Lightnin Hopkins, Buster Pickens, and many others. In the song with which Lead Belly begged a pardon of Governor Pat Neff, thus literally singing his way out of the Texas prisons, he builds sympathy for his case by telling how Bud Russell had carried him off from the Bowie County jail in 1918: "Bud Russell, which traveled all over the state and carried the men on down the state penitentiary, had me going on down. Had chains all around my neck, and I couldn't do nothing but wave my hands."

When Bud Russell retired newspapers across the state gave the story prominent space, the Associated Press carrying this eulogy on May 28, 1944:

Blum, Texas. (AP) – Uncle Bud, known to every peace officer – and most everybody else – in Texas, has retired to the life of a stock farmer, after nearly forty years of service with the State's prison system, three decades of which he spent as chief transfer agent.

Russell and his one-way wagon traveled 3,900,000 miles. And from the county jails of Texas and other states, he delivered 115,000 persons to the prison system.

Russell retired at the age of 69, which he certainly doesn't look. He quits one of the toughest jobs of them all, still with his humor intact, and with ill will toward none – not even the prisoners who gave him trouble.

When he started to work with the prison system, he transported convicts on the trains and could take as high as 80 at a time. Then he switched to trucks, the capacity of which was from 26 to 28.

And did he watch those pennies for the state! He spent an average of nine cents per meal for prisoners by buying wholesale, and drove a truck 223,000 miles on two sets of tires.

Russell has handled practically all the noted prisoners of Texas – Clyde and Buck Barrow, Raymond Hamilton – just about everybody except Bonnie Parker. For some reason, Bonnie never made Bud's one-way wagon.

But they were all the same to Bud Russell. They had to behave themselves while they were on his truck, and when they did, he had a word of praise. But he never really got mad at a prisoner until he mistreated a relative or annoyed the citizenship. He told the tough guys, "You're just forty years too late, if you think you are tougher than I am," and kept an eagle eye on his flock of jail birds every minute of the way.

That he was confident of his marksmanship was attested when he told an officer who examined his gun and found only one bullet: "Well, I came for only one prisoner, you know."

With a song that mocks him and insults his wife, Texans have found it a little easier to live with Uncle Bud roaming up and down the highways. But this gay song is never far away from the thought with which Texas Alexander prefaced his recording of "Penitentiary Moan Blues" in 1928:

Mama – she told me to stay at home, and I wouldn't . . .

She told me to stay at home and I said I couldn't . . .

But now, mama, Bud Russell's got me – And I cannot help myself.

THE GIRL I LEFT BEHIND ME: These are but two out of the hundreds of verses which soldiers and cowboys added to this old Irish song.

THERE'S A 'SKEETER: This is of course to the tune of the perennial "She'll Be Coming 'Round The Mountain."

STAVIN' CHAIN: This is one of the great Negro folk characters who has been pretty much ignored outside the folk community because of his lewd behavior. There are, however, versions of the song printed in *Our Singing Country* and in *Publications of the Texas Folklore Society, Vol. V*. In another book, *Steamboatin' Days: Folk Songs of the River Packet Era*, the authoress, Mary Wheeler, gives an unintentionally hilarious account of the difficulties she encountered in collecting a version of "Stavin' Chain." One wonders what thoughts passed through the minds of the Negro stevedores she approached, in all innocence, asking them to sing her the song that is heard here.

One of the common nicknames adopted by virile hell-raisers, the term "stavin' chain" is a play on an ancient sign designating a bond or covenant, as employed in the building of the Ark of the Covenant: "And thou shall put the staves into the rings . . ." (Exodus 25:14). However, for the laborer who spikes down or hammers staves, the act of driving a stave through the ring of a chain suggests to his active imagination the same familiar symbolism as in slipping a wedding ring over a girl's finger. Throughout Negro songs, women are identified with sweet foods, and sexual labor is identified with hard, tool-swinging work.

YOU GOT GOOD BUSINESS: Next to the joyous frenzy of the Pentecostal churches, the most exuberant spirit in American music came out of the barrelhouses. It is essentially erotic. All of its forms, techniques, and attitudes – from the hard-driving boogies to the slow-rub blues – are meant to create excitement. This piece was one of the mainstays of the barrelhouses and chock-houses that thrived along a Santa Fe spur that ran to the saw mills and turpentine camps of the Texas-Louisiana Piney Woods. Unlike most of the songs in this collection, this was not strictly limited to male gatherings. In those close, hot, dance halls the women as well as the men would call out for the piano player to give them this song – or one of the others like it such as “The Ma Grinder” or “Whores Is Funky” or “Squat Low.” But this was of course a corrupt society: men lured to isolated camps by promises and held there by contracts and private police, and women imported to keep the men from getting restless. But they made of it a better world than could have been expected. If the “marriages” yielded violence and lasted only for the duration of the work-season, they did not lack in the riches of affection and love, nor did the lovers hesitate to declare the focus of their pleasures. Note that unlike so many bawdy songs this one neither insults or disparages the female. However harsh its terms may appear to those of different backgrounds, this is essentially a song of praise.

THE DIRTY DOZENS: There is nothing in American folklore that has quite the reputation of that cycle of insults known as “The Dirty Dozens.” Probably better than ten million people have played the “game” but they’ve kept it a secret from the rest of America. Still as far back as 1919, a white girl named Gilda Gray was entertaining New Yorkers (see *Current Opinion*, Sept. 1919) with something derived from the original:

*Oh, the old dirty dozen,
The old dirty dozen;
Brothers and cousins,
Living like a hive of bees,
They keep a buzzin', fussin' and mussin'.
There wasn't a good one in the bunch.*

Some scraps appeared in the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1915, and in *Publications of the Texas Folklore Society* in 1926:

*Talk about one thing, talk about another;
But ef you talk about me, I'm gwain to talk about your mother.*

A number of derivations appeared on race records such as Henry Thomas’ “Don’t Ease Me In,” Dirty Red’s “Mother Fuyer,” Gabriel Brown’s “You Ain’t No Good,” State Street Boys’ “The Dozen,” Victoria Spivey’s “From One to Twelve,” Bumblebee Slim’s “New Mean Mistreater,” and Leroy Carr’s “The Dirty Dozen.” Most of these were inspired by the great commercial success of Speckled Red’s famed 1929 record and its sequel “The Dirty Dozen No. 2”:

*Your face is all bid, now your back's all bare,
If you ain't doing the bobo, what's your head doing down there?*

The sum of these, while far from the Dozens itself, was sufficient to establish its notorious reputation as a verbal contest in which the players strive to bury one another with vituperation. In the play, the opponent’s mother is especially slandered and thus the male asserts himself through this rejection of the feminine and by the skill with which he manages the abuse. The appropriate reply is not to deny the assault, but to return by even greater evil-speaking hurled at the other person’s mother. Then, in turn, fathers are identified as queer and syphilitic. Sisters are whores, brothers are defective, cousins are “funny” and the opponent is himself diseased. A single round of a dozen or so exchanges frees more pent-up aggressions than will a dose of sodium pentothal, though of course it is always veiled as being against the other fellow’s family. Through it all is a pervasive quality of the urban slum where too many relatives are packed into too few rooms, where children are spectators to the sex life of the parents, and shocked by the infirmities of the older relatives, and beyond which the white folks live with all that light-skin can purchase in a world of plenty. The latter point is illustrated by the expurgated scrap of the Dozens that Richard Wright wove into his autobiography, *Black Boy*: “All these white folks dressed so fine, their _____ smell just like mine.” Moreover the Dozens may offer bewildered explanations for the prerogatives of the whites, as in this recording with the verse which begins “A white man was born with a veil over his face” and thus brings to bear the belief that being born with a veil or a caul gives a person special powers. The verse draws an acutely meaningful and damning portrait, and gives the speaker ease by making the circumstances of race appear a little less arbitrary, and more a matter of special gifts.

In 1939, John Dollard’s “The Dozens: The Dialect of Insult” (in *American Image*, I) gave this remarkable social phenomena its first scholarly attention. The author links the Dozens with other children’s lore which abuses the mother, and which sometimes comes as a set of 12 rimes. Other writers concerned with human behavior, in the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* in 1947 and *American Speech* in 1950, have poked speculations at the source of the Dozens but have made the matter somewhat more mysterious than it needs to be. The name simply

derives from the accepted rules of the game which are that the dialogue shall consist of 12 insults hurled back and forth, each of which should surpass what has gone before. In actuality the game is only seldom played with so strict a discipline though these are important points of skill among the more artful players. When this is done, the enumeration may be part of each verse, or more typically each volley will be counted off by a prefacing remark such as "Now, *first* thing, I'm gonna talk about your old momma . . ." and so on up to the final and climatic twelfth exchange.

The pattern is a most-familiar one in folklore: The Tale of The Twelve Truths. As one of the most favored numbers, both for its mystic as well as its practical qualities, twelve is especially popular in setting forth sets of facts or laws. As a base, twelve occurs as the divisions of the Zodiac, in the fixtures of Heaven (Revelations 21, 22) and in the measure of hours, inches, and dice. Its history ranges from the earliest Roman Law, codified in the 5th Century B.C. as the *XII Tables*, to the fact that it is still twelve men that we put in the jury box. Invariably, apostles of truth and rule are counted by the dozen whether they be peers, elders, patriarch, knights, or the Disciples of Christ. While this comes to us as Christian custom, the early Christian tradition was itself following a pattern that has been traced to the ancient Orient and is known in a wide range of mythic formula. Narratives which count-off a dozen facts or beliefs are known in many different cultures. Second only to counting on the ten fingers, the duodecimal system is preferred by communities which rely on oral tradition for committing twelve truths of one kind or another to memory. It is, for example, used in the catechismal form of many religious tracts:

Q: Of the Twelve Truths of the World, tell me one?

A: One is the House of the Lord where Christ crucified lives and reigns forevermore.

Q: Tell me two?

A: The two are the tables on which Moses wrote his Divine Law.

. . . etc.

There are numerous examples of folk song which count-off articles of faith, of worship, or other items, usually twelve in number, and often as a kind of ritual dialogue: "Carol of the Twelve Numbers," "Green Grow The Rushes, Oh," and "The Twelve Days of Christmas." These probably come directly from the 16th Century Passover chant "Ehad Mi Yodea" which pays tribute to One God, two tablets of Moses, three patriarchs, four mothers . . . and so on, up to the twelve tribes of Israel, and the thirteen attributes of God. A few years ago all the juke boxes carried a modern example in "Deck of Cards," a dreary recitation assigning a religious significance to each card in the deck from Ace to King. Another modern descendant is the lusty drinking song "Here's To Good Old Beer" which ticks off twelve successive toasts to beer, whiskey, brandy, vodka, ale, and so on.

In Negro tradition the twelve-pattern is particularly favored. It has, for instance, expanded the old English carol "The Seven Blessings of Mary" to become "Sister Mary's Twelve Blessings." (see the Tuskegee Institute collection published in 1884). However, best known is the standard quartet piece, "The Twelve Apostles," which begins One was the Holy Babe, Two was Paul and Silas, Three was the Hebrew children, Four was the four come a-knocking on the door, etc.

While all of these illustrate the popularity of the pattern, the direct basis for "The Dirty Dozens" was a 19th Century religious teaching device: a canto of twelve verses setting forth essential Biblical facts which children were made to memorize. It typically began:

Book of Genesis got the first truth,

God Almighty took a ball of mud to make this earth.

It doubtless originated in slavery, though the recollections of elderly Negroes still living can place it only back to the 1880s. Some recall "The Bible Dozens" as being but a single set of twelve rimes, but others recall different ones having to do with favorite books of the Bible. A man in Conroe, Texas remembers fragments of one set summarizing the Crucifixion, another having to do with Jonah, and one capsuling the Book of Revelations, its final verse being derived from Chapter 21:

Twelve jewels is the foundation to Heaven,

And twelve gates to admit the saved children.

In a community where there is little literacy such mnemonics play an important role in teaching children and of course, youngsters drilled in this fashion will instantly produce a burlesque. Thus, "The Dirty Dozens" was born, a vehicle for tirade and insult dwelling at first on the physical charms of others: "When the Lord gave you shape, he musta been thinking of an ape; your mother knows and your father too, it hurts my eyes to look at you." An old vaudevillian named Sugar Foot Green recalls once employing an act in which a young man comes out on stage and begins piously reciting the Biblical Dozens, but promptly becomes the stooge for the comedian who continually interrupts him with slurs:

First: Book of Genesis got the first truth . . .

Second: No, you ugly thing, I got the first truth,

Somebody kicked a ball of mud to let you loose.

Another minstrel and medicine show adaptation appears on the *Blues N' Trouble* anthology (Arhoolie F1006) in "God Don't Like Ugly" sung by the aged Sam Chatman in 1960. This one clearly shows vestiges of the original "Bible Dozens" but turned to detail the ugliness of the one being slandered:

*God took a ball of mud
When he got ready to make man.
When he went to make the part that was you,
I believe it slipped outa his hand.*

*Adam named everything
They put out in the zoo.
I'd like Adam to be here
To see what in hell he called you.*

*cho: I don't play no dozens –
Cause I didn't learn to count to twelve
They tell me God don't like ugly:
Say, boy, you're home's in Hell.*

(Yet another burlesque probably based on the Biblical Dozens is a monologue of white minstrels, "Darky Sunday School," which mocks Negro worship: "Then down came Peter, the Keeper of the Gates; He came down cheap on excursion rates.")

However, "The Dirty Dozens" did not remain long a religious parody but grew to serve a significant function in its own right. In *Blues Fell This Morning* (Cassell, 1960), Paul Oliver associates the Dozens with other insult-songs circulated by adult Negroes, taking vengeance on bosses, relatives, and neighbors: "If a particular person was the subject of enmity in a Negro folk community the offended man would 'put his foot up' – in other words, jam the door of his cabin with his foot and sing a blues that 'put in the Dozens' at the expense of his enemy . . ." Thus a person will retort "Don't ease me in," and even in the midst of returning the abuse will piously maintain "I don't play the Dozens, doncha ease me in." In an article entitled "Playing The Dozens" (*Journal of American Folklore*, 1962) Roger D. Abrahams⁽¹⁾ discusses the psychological function of the game, both as an essential cathartic and a means to sharpen necessary tools, among its originators, Negro children: "But the dozens functions as more than simply a mutual exorcism society. It also serves to develop one of the devices by which the nascent man will have to defend himself – verbal contest. Such a battle in reality is much more important to the psychical growth of the Negro than actual physical battle. In fact, almost all communication among this group is basically agonistic, from the fictive experience of the narratives to the plying of the proverbs. Though the children have maneuvers which involve a kind of verbal strategy, it is the contest of the dozens which provides the Negro youth with his first opportunity to wage verbal battle."

The commercial race record and the written description must necessarily fall short of evoking the power of the Dozens. This can only be done by letting it assail the ears. There was, however, a passage in Gilmore Millen's novel *Sweet Man* (Viking, 1930) which with uncanny foresight describes not only this recording but also the mood and posture of the man from whom it was obtained. The book speaks of a blues singer named Midnight: "... his eyes would close and he would clutch a cigarette butt in the left corner of his mouth when he mumbled one of the foulest anthems of invective ever composed in the English language, a song that few white men have heard even snatches of – the true 'Dozens'."

LIMERICKS: That the limerick is folklore sustained entirely by the college-educated was again demonstrated in collecting these examples. Men with university degrees produced them by the score, but others present – the workmen who are generally the far better source of oral tradition – remained mute. The limerick is a pastime of bored students and it has been said that the anapaestic rhythm and strict *a-a-b-b-a* structure of the limerick constitute the only original English contribution to poetic form. Its history goes back at least to the poem of anonymous make which tells the marvelous adventures of "Tom of Bedlam" which became widely known in the mid 1600s. Swinburne, Rossetti, Kipling, and Dylan Thomas are but a few of the name poets who have felt the urge to make a bawdy limerick. The list of connoisseurs reads like Who's Who with some especially notable entries being

(1) See also Abrahams' book Deep Down In The Jungle: Negro Narrative Folklore From the Streets of Philadelphia to be published in the winter of 1963-64. An intense study of spoken tradition among the Negroes of one city, this book will be unique in that it will place bawdy lore in proper perspective and deal with it without expurgation.

Supreme Court Justices Oliver Wendell Holmes and Felix Frankfurter who once prevailed upon Judge Learned Hand to sing a ribald song known as "The Cabin Boy" (reported in *Life*, Nov. 4, 1946). While there are several notorious songs telling of fornication at sea which answers to this name, the one best known in Eastern law colleges is a ballad of "The Good Ship Venus" told in limerick-stanzas.

Two collections of the bawdy limerick have been published: *Some Limericks* which appeared in 1928 was the work of the celebrated British novelist Norman Douglas, and *The Limerick*, published in 1953, which contains more than 1700 unexpurgated examples both from rare private publications and from oral tradition. Choice collections of limericks – on the same order as those heard here – are housed at Columbia, Harvard, the New York Public Library, and in the "X" file of the Archive of American Folk Song in the Library of Congress, Washington.

THE BALL OF KIRRIEMUIR: The town of Kirriemuir (pop. 3,432) is located in County Angus, Scotland, just north of the seaport of Dundee. It is situated on a height above the glen through which the Gairie flows. The staple industry is linen weaving. Sir James Barrie (1860-1937), author of *Peter Pan*, was born and buried there and made the town famous with *Auld Licht Idylls*, a volume of sketches of life in his native village. The present fame of Kirriemuir is, however, due to the legendary orgy reported in this epic ballad which is known and sung throughout the English speaking world. Some versions run to 70-plus stanzas, each of which described a different participant: postman, blacksmith, village idiot, minister, chambermaid, grocer, bailiff, plowman, shepherd, druggist, weaver, and so on. (Another version, going on to 17-stanzas, will be included in a collection of British bawdry titled *The Bloody Great Wheel* which is being prepared for release).

The ballad may be fairly described as a rare folk memory of a vital custom suppressed and unknown in the modern world. Yet through most of man's history and until quite recent times, the turning of the seasons was punctuated by the ritual and abandoned play of the love-feast. The practice evolved not as some evil but as a measure to protect the structure of society. Historically, as different cultures laid increasing stress on the family institution and the marital bond, they typically provided for well-defined periods of license when those bonds were temporarily suspended. The ancient hypothesis that the licensed occasion serves as an essential safety valve is still respected in some corners of the globe which retain a sane and realistic grasp of human nature. As a case in point, the love-feast is practiced by the Stone-Age aborigines who inhabit the northern Australian wastes, Arnhem Land. A member of the Murngin tribe has stated its reasons succinctly: "This makes everybody clean. It makes everybody's body good until next dry season . . . It is better that everybody comes with their women and all meet together at a *Gunabibi* and play with each other, and then nobody will start having sweethearts the rest of the time . . ." (quoted in *A Black Civilization* by Lloyd Warner, 1958).

In the British Isles the practice has been known through both the Roman invader, who brought word of their Saturnalia and Bacchanalian rites, and through a broad spectrum of Celtic tradition. The latter ranges from the legendary Feast of Bricriu (in which a mere three returning heroes are greeted by "such as they preferred of 150 girls" encamped in a house "fitted up with beds of surpassing magnificence"); on to the sacred fertility rites at which couples sprawled in the open fields and the priests rendered blessings as new seed was sown in the earth. As recently as the 17th century a traveler in rural Ireland reported that the guest of an Ulster chief "was at the door with sixteen women all naked except for their loose mantles; whereof eight or ten were very faire and two seemed very nymphs." (From Fynes Moryson's *Itinerary*, Fol. 181, *Travels*, London, 1617). Nonetheless, by the late Middle Ages the licensed occasion no longer enjoyed broad social approval. In its stead had come the notion of an ideal of unrelenting monogamy, and a civilization which outwardly makes much of subscribing to it while in fact finding it impossible to practice.

In this struggle to pretend to be what man is not, the casualties are enormous. It is not merely that our ritual sense of life has been corrupted by letting Mardi Gras become a tourist attraction, May Day become an occasion for making newsreels of heavy artillery rumbling through Red Square, and the Harvest Moon Ball an event which concludes with the Sammy Kaye Orchestra playing "Goodnight, Ladies." On the critical level of day-to-day events the psychiatrist, divorce lawyer, and homicide officer can attest to what occurs with individuals who try, and fail, to live up to the present sexual codes and finally do themselves or others irrational violence. The statistics alone suggest the code makes demands which are neither healthy nor realistic.

However, it is the *Bible* itself with its acute knowledge of human nature, that yields a vastly larger and more awesome picture. In the Book of Exodus, chapter 32, there is a dramatic sketch of what occurs when one community passion is condemned and another encouraged. Here, the reader learns that as Moses descended from Mount Sinai bearing the tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments, he heard singing from the camp of the waiting Hebrew tribes. And on entering the camp he saw the people dancing naked about a golden calf. In a fury, he commands a substitute for such behavior: "Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion and every man his neighbor." The report

goes on to state that 3000 men died that day. The Law of Moses is harsh indeed when it recommends that the pleasures of a festival be sublimated to the higher cultural ends of slaughtering neighbors. Clearly, the implication is that sexual passion may be diverted into one for bloodshed. The *Bible* again makes the point that the one lust may serve in the stead of the other where a man with a new bride is enjoined not to go to war but rather to stay at home and "cheer up his wife which he hath taken." (*Deut.* 24:5)

Given that the human community is generally warlike and invariably courting with sexual curiosity, is there then any choice between satisfying one or the other? Could it be so simple a matter as to either indulge ourselves from time to time, or else let another kind of frenzy carry us to Tarawa, Normandy, Hiroshima? Though the proposition has an absurd ring against prevailing standards, let us speculate for the moment on what difference attitudes might be focused on a summit conference by nations which have first relieved themselves of many personal acquisitive goals and ego-triumphs through a time of licensed play. Does a society which has first had its ball, feel quite the same inclination to slaughter its neighbors? It is not, after all, an absurdity for at every turning there is evidence to the effect that sexual ambitions thwarted at home sour and drain into such aggressions as send young men over the world with bayonet and bomb.

With this happy song, the good folk of Kirriemuir describe an ancient alternative.

CHANGE THE NAME OF ARKANSAS!!!: According to the speaker, this is an authentic version of the famous speech given in the Arkansas legislature in 1867 when it was proposed to that body that a law be enacted to change the spelling to "Arkansaw." He gives as his authority the actual legislative records which — having heard versions of the speech — he investigated during a visit to Little Rock. Others, however, have been unable to locate any record of the speech though there can be little doubt that at some occasion it was made and was launched into oral tradition by members of the legislature. For years toastmasters and Southern orators have sharpened their skills by vehemently rendering the speech in private gatherings. For the older generations its purple rhetoric, hammering at a single though symbolic attempt to change Southern customs, serves to assuage the grievances that rose from the Reconstruction era. Its fame is such that various diluted versions have been included in many standard books, one in *Folk Song U.S.A.* and two different ones in *The Treasury of American Folklore*, George Williams, a member of the Arkansas legislature from Pulaski County in the early 1900s, provided one account of the speech which was, however, expurgated before it was included in *Folklore of Romantic Arkansas*. Yet another version, not expurgated but badly garbled, is found on under-the-counter "party" records by the title "Mr. Speaker." And the longest version appeared in an undated pamphlet circulated some years ago which was credited to Cassius M. Johnson — the same illustrious speaker from Jackson County, Arkansas who is credited with the present version.

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No single documentary album can begin to encompass a major area of folk song. While necessarily incomplete, the contents of this collection do indicate the wide range of the bawdy song and the manner in which it relates to numerous aspects of the bawdy song and the manner in which it relates to numerous aspects of our culture: the sexual unrest and the secretive need to belittle women; the interplay of tradition between England and America, the contrast of white and Negro attitudes as well as the Negro's internal struggle to deal with his environment; the niches in popular history accorded such figures as Bud Russell and James Folsom as well as the myth-making centered on such as Stavin' Chain and Barnacle Bill. Like all folklore, it reflects the values and the special problems of the group and the individuals within it, and precisely because it is clandestine, the bawdy song is a valuable clue and essential study for anyone who wishes to honestly examine our society. It is an integral part of our traditions and therefore an asset to the study of folklore, or to any vigorous discipline which attempts to get at the heart of the beliefs and the understandings of all peoples.